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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. The present report focuses on developments since my previous report (S/2008/395), dated 17 June 2008, in particular the security and political tensions in the run-up to the legislative elections to be held on 16 November 2008.

II. Political developments

3. The period under review was marked by a deepening political malaise and the spectres of military tension and pressure. Relations between the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and the Social Renewal Party (PRS), two of the three signatories to the political and government stability pact, have continued to deteriorate since April 2007, with both seeking to control key ministerial posts. The Government also came under attack from opposition political parties over alleged corruption and the general deterioration of living conditions.

4. Relations between the leaders of PAIGC, Carlos Gomes Jr., and the Prime Minister, Martinho N'Dafa Cabi, deteriorated as both contested the leadership of the party during its congress held from 26 June to 2 July 2008. Mr. Gomes won the election with an overall majority of 51.4 per cent (578 votes), followed by Malam Bacai Sanha with 31.5 per cent (355 votes) and Mr. N'Dafa Cabi with 8.45 per cent (95 votes). Signs of a rapprochement between the President, João Bernardo Vieira, and the party, including its leader, Mr. Gomes, were observed, largely engineered by influential veterans of PAIGC. At the party congress, President Vieira was invited to accept the post of honorary President, although he has not yet indicated his acceptance of the offer.

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5. Tensions mounted when the Prime Minister signed a decree in July 2008, without reference to the Finance Minister or PAIGC, appointing PRS candidates to the posts of Directors-General of the Treasury, Revenue and Taxes, and Customs. The Prime Minister's actions boosted allegations among his critics in his party that he was favouring PRS. PAIGC withdrew from the political and government stability pact on 28 July, but PRS and the third signatory, the United Social Democratic Party (PUSD), decided to remain in the pact.

6. On 1 August, the Supreme Court ruled that the exceptional transitional constitutional law, by which the National Assembly had extended its mandate beyond 21 April 2008, was unconstitutional. The ruling, which was welcomed by civil society organizations, prompted President Vieira to dissolve Parliament on 5 August, after consulting the Council of State, the Speaker of Parliament and other national stakeholders. In a decree published on the same day, the President dismissed the Government and appointed a new Prime Minister, Carlos Correia, to set up a caretaker Government. At a meeting with my Representative for Guinea-Bissau, Shola Omoregie, on 6 August, Mr. Correia stated that the organization of legislative elections would be the priority of his Government. He also affirmed his Government's commitment to combating drug trafficking.

7. On 9 August, the Prime Minister issued a complete list of his Cabinet appointees, which comprises 21 ministers and 7 secretaries of State. He retained the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance and Justice from the previous Government, thus ensuring continuity in the three key areas where the international community is supporting the Government: security sector reform, the anti-narcotics strategy and fiscal reform. The Government, although drawn largely from PAIGC, also includes two PUSD ministers, five PRS members and one member of the United People's Alliance, a relatively minor political grouping. The new Cabinet has only three women, compared with five in the previous Cabinet. PRS distanced itself from the Government, arguing that it had not been consulted about the appointments of its members, whom it described as "dissidents".

8. The spectre of military instability emerged again in August when the authorities reported that they had uncovered an attempted coup d'état, allegedly organized by the Navy Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto. President Vieira informed my Representative that the Chief of the General Staff, General Tagme Na Waie, had confirmed that the plot was to have been carried out on 1 August and that an investigation was under way. The Rear Admiral was suspended and kept under house arrest, and subsequently escaped. On 12 August, authorities in the Gambia reported that he had been arrested on their territory and they sought the assistance of the United Nations to return him to Guinea-Bissau. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea-Bissau later visited the Gambia to discuss with the authorities there the issue of the Rear Admiral's presence in that country.

9. The leader of PRS, former President Kumba Yalá, returned to Bissau on 7 July 2008 after an absence of about one year. He announced that he had converted to Islam, assuming the name Mohamed Yalá Embaló. Some analysts saw the conversion as a political manoeuvre to strengthen his party's appeal within the country's Muslim community, which accounts for about 40 per cent of the population. Mr. Yalá left the country on 8 August in the wake of the discovery of the coup attempt.

10. On 28 August, local representatives of the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau met at UNOGBIS. They were briefed by the Ministers of Finance and Justice and the President of the National Electoral Commission on, respectively, the economic situation, drug trafficking and preparations for the legislative elections. Earlier, in Bissau on 25 and 26 August, the heads of United Nations peace missions in West Africa had held their fourteenth high level meeting. The meeting was attended by my Special Representatives for West Africa, Said Djinnit, for Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, and for Côte d'Ivoire, Choi Young-Jin, as well as my Representative for Guinea-Bissau. The President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mohammed Ibn Chambas, participated in the proceedings as invited guest speaker. His presence facilitated discussions on the need for stronger links and cooperation with ECOWAS in the areas of security, conflict prevention and the consolidation of peace in West Africa. At the meeting it was noted that, while significant progress had been made in consolidating peace and restoring stability in the subregion, a number of countries continued to experience persistent challenges in the domains of security, governance and development, exacerbated by the emergence of new threats of drug trafficking and organized crime as a whole.

11. During the reporting period, the participatory dialogue programme led by the National Institute for Studies and Research in partnership with Interpeace — Voz di Paz/Voice of Peace — continued its grass-roots consultations, involving more than 3,600 people in 39 administrative sectors of the country, to identify obstacles to the consolidation of peace. The main sources of conflict identified were: the weakness of the State; widespread poverty; insecurity; poor administration of justice; poor management of natural resources; the struggle for power as a means of controlling and using for personal benefit the meagre resources of the State; the manipulation of ethnicity for political reasons; the absence of a culture of dialogue; the loss or inversion of social values as stimulants of violence; and harmful traditional practices as a source of recurrent intra- and inter-ethnic tensions, as well as inter-religious tensions. The next phase will be to synthesize the findings and focus further participatory research on some of the recurrent national challenges for more in-depth deliberations by the authorities and political and civil society actors.

III. Elections

12. The President and the Prime Minister have given assurances that legislative elections will be held on 16 November 2008, as scheduled. The Office of the President, in a communiqué issued on 14 August, said that there was no reason to postpone the elections unless it was proved that the voter registration exercise was "less than transparent". In response, PRS issued a statement on 15 August denouncing what the party saw as the President's real intention, to postpone the elections. PRS expressed concern about the tense political situation and reaffirmed its determination to abide by the scheduled election date. The party also warned that it would fight any "government of drug traffickers" that might emerge from fraudulent elections.

13. The manual voter registration exercise was carried out between 3 and 29 July 2008, having been extended by three days. The registration process was financed mainly by contributions from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. The then Minister of the Interior, Certório Biote, announced on 5 August that despite the

difficulties posed by the rainy season and logistical problems, the results had been excellent. He stated that 578,974 of an estimated electorate of 611,875 were registered, corresponding to 94.6 per cent of the estimated total. The results were accepted by the main national electoral institutions, including the National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process. The provisional lists will be published at the various polling sectors and voters will be allowed two weeks, as from 5 September 2008, to file amendments and complaints. The definitive list should be ready by 17 October 2008.

14. The electoral financing gap has narrowed. On 1 September 2008, the European Commission announced that €1.5 million would be made available in October for the elections, a contribution which would reduce the current financing gap to around $350,000. To date, the following donations have been made to the basket fund of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the elections: €600,000 (European Union), $430,000 (Brazil), $610,000 (UNDP), $1,381,889 (Peacebuilding Fund), $700,000 (Angola), €65,000 (Portugal) and $500,000 (ECOWAS). The Government made $356,295 available towards covering the sovereignty costs, budgeted at $4.3 million. The following pledges have also been made: approximately $1.068 million from the Government and $399,644 in kind from Portugal in the form of election materials. Most of the sovereignty costs are linked to the debts owed to election workers accrued from previous elections.

15. On 3 June 2008, a European electoral observer mission visited Guinea-Bissau to assess the political, logistical and security conditions on the ground in advance of the November polls. In its final recommendations, the mission noted that, despite some constraints, the conditions were in place to deploy an estimated 50 international European Union electoral observers. The electoral observer mission was scheduled to begin deploying to Bissau by 15 September. The African Union sent an assessment mission, headed by the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mauritius, Anil Gayan, which visited Guinea-Bissau from 18 to 21 August 2008. ECOWAS will also be sending a team of observers. UNOGBIS will be coordinating those international observers who will not operate under the European Union umbrella.

IV. Military and security aspects

16. A military tribunal is investigating the coup attempt alleged to have been led by the former Navy Chief of Staff. The marines formerly under his command have been dispersed to other barracks throughout the country, while some navy personnel have remained in the naval barracks in Bissau. An interim Navy Chief of Staff has been appointed.

17. On 20 August 2008, within the framework of the security sector reform programme, 30 senior military officers, including two generals, were transferred from active service to reserve status at a ceremony marking the start of the programme. At the ceremony, the Minister of Defence stated that reform was irreversible. The Chief of the General Staff stressed that the armed forces were not averse to reform and appealed to the international community for assistance to properly implement the reform and avoid a situation in which those affected would be resentful or reduced to penury. The 30 officers will attend briefings in Nigeria

before taking part in a one-year reinsertion training programme in Brazil financed by ECOWAS.

18. The deployment of a team of 15 European civilian and military personnel under the European Security and Defence Policy programme, which was launched on 1 July 2008, has been completed. The team will hold four workshops in September to promote a better understanding of the four-pillar programme on justice, security, defence and veterans affairs. The terms of reference for a census of veterans have been prepared, and the exercise, which is due to start in the coming weeks, will be funded by the European Union to the tune of approximately €300,000.

19. The National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons was offered new facilities and has received information technology equipment from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. It has also received $60,000 for projects under the ECOWAS Small Arms Programme (ECOSAP). The funds will be used for a pilot project and office refurbishment. An ECOSAP assessment mission, which visited Guinea-Bissau from 9 to 12 August 2008, gave a positive assessment of the Commission's work and concluded that it was progressing at a rapid pace.

20. UNOGBIS, UNDP and other partners organized a workshop from 3 to 5 September for the public law and order institutions of Guinea-Bissau, aimed at strengthening collaboration and working relationships among them as part of the effort to address the prevailing challenges to national security and public order. The workshop, which was opened by the Prime Minister, was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Justice and the judicial police, the Ministry of the Interior and the public order police, the Ministry of Defence and the military and the Office of the Prosecutor General.

V. Threats posed by drug trafficking

21. On 12 July 2008, a plane from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela landed at Bissau airport without the requisite landing or overflight permits or the prior knowledge of airport officials. Immediately on landing, it was cordoned off by military personnel and its cargo unloaded into vehicles and taken to an unknown destination. The plane could not take off owing to technical difficulties, and on 17 July a plane from Senegal arrived with engineers to provide technical assistance. The Minister of Justice announced that she had not been notified about the unauthorized landing of the plane until 17 July. The three-person crew of the Venezuelan plane and two airport control officers were detained on 19 July. At the request of the judicial police, UNOGBIS, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States of America, INTERPOL and others assisted in an investigation entitled "Operation Bissalanca". On 16 July, experts from INTERPOL, accompanied by two sniffer dogs, arrived in Bissau. The joint team initiated a search of the plane only on 26 July, closely monitored by military personnel, who blocked the investigators' attempts to remove the black box and Global Positioning System apparatus as part of their investigation. The military made contradictory statements about the cargo. It was suggested that the plane was carrying medicine from Spain, while a written statement by the Venezuelan pilot indicated that the aircraft had come from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The crew of the plane was released on 19 August 2008 by order of a

criminal court judge, despite the issuance of an international warrant against one member and protests by the Minister of Justice and the Prosecutor General. The pilot subsequently disappeared. Bail was reportedly set at 82 million CFA francs (approximately $181,187). The judge, who had argued that the Prosecution had failed to provide compelling evidence to hold the crew in custody, was subsequently suspended from his duties.

22. At the meeting with the local representatives of the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, held on 28 August 2008, the Minister of Justice provided an overview of lessons learned from Operation Bissalanca. She noted that the operation had highlighted the lack of operational and investigative capacity and the inadequate response of the judicial police, the benefits of international cooperation, the dimension of drug trafficking through the country, the growing evidence of national involvement, the urgent need to convene the ECOWAS conference on drug trafficking, scheduled to be held in Cape Verde, and the need to consider stronger action against national and foreign drug traffickers.

23. Following the International Conference on Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, held in Lisbon in December 2007, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provided the judicial police with information technology equipment, a generator and fuel, communications equipment for its 35 officers and 15 vehicles, including 10 motorcycles. From 7 to 12 September 2008, two judicial police investigators attended a training course in Cape Verde on latent fingerprinting. Judicial police premises are being refurbished and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has undertaken to support a project to strengthen a pool of prosecutors in the area of counter-narcotics. The national authorities continue to appeal for international support to combat drug trafficking in the face of an upsurge in the rate of drug trafficking and organized crime as a whole.

VI. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund

24. Considerable progress has been made on activities related to the ongoing engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Guinea-Bissau. Following my approval, in April 2008, of an interim priority plan and the initial envelope of $6 million in financial assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund, the National Steering Committee approved four short-term projects for electoral support, youth employment and the rehabilitation of prisons and military barracks. Those projects are at various stages of implementation, with support from relevant United Nations agencies, among other partners. A comprehensive priority plan, of which the interim plan for peacebuilding is an integral part, is being jointly formulated by the Government and the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau, and would facilitate the release of the rest of the funding envelope of the Peacebuilding Fund.

25. Arrangements are under way to set up a national peacebuilding fund secretariat office for Guinea-Bissau, to be hosted by UNOGBIS. The secretariat would be responsible for oversight and reporting mechanisms associated with the implementation of the four short-term projects and provide administrative support for the activities of the National Steering Committee, which is entrusted with coordinating the overall engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund in the country.

26. The strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau is now ready for final consultations and adoption by the Government and its partners through the National Steering Committee and the Council of Ministers. As co-Chair of the National Steering Committee, my Representative in Guinea-Bissau has been working closely with the national co-Chair to ensure proper facilitation by the United Nations and international partners of the activities and engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with national counterparts.

27. As part of the effort to maintain the momentum of the engagement of the Commission in Guinea-Bissau, particularly in the run-up to the legislative elections of November 2008, the Chairperson of the country-specific configuration on Guinea-Bissau, Maria Luiza Viotti, visited the country from 10 to 12 September 2008. The visit was particularly significant in the context of the recent change in Government and other ongoing political developments. Accompanied by officials from the Peacebuilding Support Office, Mrs. Viotti held consultations with all relevant national and international stakeholders, including the President, the Prime Minister, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Finance and Defence, the Chief of the General Staff and representatives of civil society organizations, international partners and the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau. Those consultations focused on the next steps in the finalization of the strategic framework and the enhancement of Commission support and resource mobilization initiatives, especially for the upcoming elections and the ongoing efforts in the area of security sector reform.

VII. Economic and social aspects

28. The fiscal situation remains a matter of concern, as international food and fuel price rises have had a negative impact on the economy. On 28 July 2008, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a disbursement of approximately $2.9 million under the emergency post-conflict assistance programme. That was the second and final disbursement under the programme in support of the 2008 economic programme designed to contribute to easing the fiscal situation. The decision was taken following the favourable outcome of an IMF mission undertaken in May 2008. IMF stated that Guinea-Bissau had made significant progress in macroeconomic stabilization and structural reforms in an adverse external environment. Four of the six quantitative indicators set by IMF have been met. The other two indicators are expected to be met for the year as a whole. Agreement was reached on measures for the remainder of 2008 to keep the country on track. If performance under the emergency post-conflict assistance programme continues to be satisfactory, a new medium-term programme under the poverty reduction and growth facility arrangement could be discussed later this year between the Government and an IMF mission tentatively scheduled to be undertaken in October 2008. Such a programme would allow the country to benefit from debt relief.

29. An annual growth rate of more than 3 per cent is expected this year, following a slight increase in cashew production, a sharp rise in cashew prices and an increase in construction activity. Cashew exports are expected to reach 105,729 tons, 10 per cent more than in 2007. The average price in 2008 is $783.84 per ton, as against $486.13 per ton in 2007. However, the impact of high food and fuel prices on poverty reduction, economic growth and social stability are a major cause of

concern. Inflation stood at 3.2 per cent at the end of 2006, but rising food prices, in particular, had driven it up to 9.1 per cent by May 2008. Government measures to alleviate the social consequences of food and fuel price increases led to reduction in tariffs on rice and fuel. The Government owes two months' salary arrears for July and August 2008. The country received the following in budget support from its partners: 1.5 billion CFA francs (approximately $3.5 million) from the West African Economic and Monetary Union to address the food crisis; 1.6 billion CFA francs (approximately $3.8 million) from the Central Bank of West African States and $1.5 million from the World Bank.

30. The Managing Director of the World Bank, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, visited Bissau from 19 to 21 July 2008. During her visit, she urged the authorities to look beyond the November elections and select high-impact projects for the next two to five years. Guinea-Bissau will receive a grant of $5 million from the Global Food Crisis Response Programme trust funds: $1.5 million to help mitigate the losses to the budget resulting from tax exemptions on rice and fuel imports and $3.5 million as a contribution to the Government's emergency plan for the 2008-2009 agricultural campaign in support of community-driven activities. In addition, the World Bank has continued its activities in the education sector, undertaking two technical missions, from 20 to 26 July and from 23 to 28 August 2008. The African Development Bank approved, on 30 July, interim debt relief for three years under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

31. The price of rice in Guinea-Bissau increased by 75 per cent, from 12,000 CFA francs per 50 kg bag in January to 21,000 CFA francs in July 2008. As noted earlier, the Government has taken important fiscal measures to combat soaring prices. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations launched a project to support the most affected households through the provision of agricultural inputs and veterinary products. The World Bank will also contribute by increasing its provision of seed and tools, as well as other agricultural inputs. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is supporting a package of essential and cost-effective interventions designed to reduce child mortality. This year, a campaign to administer vitamin A reached over 90 per cent of children between the ages of 6 months and 59 months. The World Food Programme (WFP) has been covering 23 per cent of the population in terms of food assistance, targeting schoolchildren, malnourished children and breastfeeding and pregnant women. The *Human Development Report 2007/2008* ranks Guinea-Bissau 175th out of 177 nations, dramatically emphasizing the scope and depth of the socio-economic challenges facing the country.

32. As concerns the health sector, a cholera epidemic has been affecting the country since mid-May, in particular the regions of Bissau, Biombo and Quinara. As at 14 September, a total of 6,126 cases had been recorded, with 119 deaths reported. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, in particular, have been working closely with the Ministry of Health to combat the epidemic through measures such as disinfecting the water system of Bissau and traditional wells and distributing hygiene and sanitation products, conducting a public-health media campaign and procuring medical and non-medical supplies. Funding of $600,000 for those activities was obtained from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. Although the epidemic has been exacerbated by the torrential rains and severe deficiencies in water and sanitation infrastructure, the political crisis over the previous two months has diverted critical Government attention from the cholera

crisis. The endemic nature of the disease calls for a longer-term strategy, which the United Nations country team is advocating.

33. WHO and other United Nations agencies have also supported the mobilization of $44 million through the seventh round of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. WHO has also provided technical assistance for the revision and development of a national tuberculosis strategic plan.

VIII. Human rights aspects

34. UNOGBIS has been closely following the case of the late judicial police officer, Liberato Neves, who was killed and whose body was put on public display on 13 April 2008 following the attack on the judicial police headquarters by some public order policemen. The police agents involved in the killing of the officer have not yet been questioned, as the defence lawyers and the former Minister of the Interior considered that it was a military, rather than civil, crime. There is little consensus concerning the case. The Office of the Public Prosecutor had requested that the police agents involved in the attack be transferred to one of the city's holding prisons to facilitate the investigation, but the former Minister of the Interior rejected the request on grounds of security. It is felt that if measures are not taken, the case will again deepen the worrying perception that impunity is rife in the country.

35. According to several reports, some citizens are taking the law into their own hands, as they feel that law enforcement structures are inefficient and weak or non-existent, particularly in the provinces. Following reports that N'kuman, a group of young adults in the region of Oio, was extending its activities outside its communities and assuming the law-and-order functions of the State, the Prosecutor General visited the region on 7 July 2008. As a result of investigations, 16 people were detained in Farim and are awaiting trial for common or violent crimes. The fear is that such groups, which have a customary role to play within their communities, may pose a serious threat to inter-communal relations if they extend the scope of their activities, or become politically instrumentalized during the electoral period.

36. With regard to press freedom, random cases of harassment of the press have been reported. The director of the private newspaper *Kansaré*, Fafali Koudawo, was questioned by the Office of the Prosecutor General in connection with the publication of an article in July 2008 which had first appeared in the magazine *Afrique Diagnostique* in May 2008. The magazine reported that two former senior army officers, who had characterized the methods of the Chief of the General Staff as "authoritarian and anti-constitutional", had received death threats. The Chief of the General Staff refuted the allegations. The editor of the newspaper was summoned to the Office of the Prosecutor General to provide evidence of his assertion, made in a radio programme in August 2008, that there had been a rapprochement between President Vieira and the leader of PAIGC. The trial of another journalist from Guinea-Bissau, Alberto Dabó, initially scheduled for July 2008, did not take place. Mr. Dabó, who works for an international press agency and a local radio station, was charged with violating State secrets, libel, abusing the freedom of the press and collusion with foreign journalists, following a complaint to the court by the former Navy Chief of Staff. State television is increasingly biased

in its news reporting, focusing on the activities of PAIGC at the expense of the other parties.

37. Within the framework of a forum of organizations working to promote humanitarian conditions in detention centres, UNOGBIS, in partnership with Justice and Peace, an ecumenical organization, Simão Mendes National Hospital, the Spanish non-governmental organization AIDA and the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League, visited two holding prisons and the military prison in Bissau in order to assess detention conditions there. As a result of the visit, it was concluded that conditions were dramatically inhuman; most of the detainees were ill owing to a lack of basic sanitary conditions, water and food, overpopulation in the cells and the fact that no medical or social facilities were provided by the State.

38. A total of 38 journalists attended two workshops organized by UNOGBIS on electoral and human rights issues and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and on coverage of the forthcoming November 2008 legislative elections. UNOGBIS also co-sponsored a training workshop for journalists, organized by the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League and held from 4 to 6 June 2008. The workshop was attended by 20 male and 10 female journalists from various parts of the country. The subjects discussed included press ethics during elections, press freedom and civil and criminal responsibility, journalism and development, the consolidation of peace and conflict prevention and the role of the media in community development. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has agreed to support a fund, to be set up by UNOGBIS, to enable the media of Guinea-Bissau to cover the 2008 legislative elections countrywide. The $60,000 fund will be used for logistics, accommodation and the purchase of communications and recording equipment. The aim is to reduce the dependence of the media on the political parties for logistical support.

IX. Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

39. UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team supported a round of regional consultations throughout May 2008, rounding up the activities with a three-day national workshop, held from 17 to 19 June, aimed at mainstreaming gender issues and enhancing the participation of women in peace consolidation efforts in the country. The recommendations resulting from the workshop are being integrated into the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. Recently, the National Steering Committee considered the inclusion of two women representatives in the Committee.

40. During the regional and national consultations, special efforts were undertaken to identify constraints impeding women's participation in elections, and several recommendations were developed. The constraints identified included the absence of women representatives within the independent National Electoral Commission, the lack of normative provisions to ensure that women are placed at the top of party lists and the lack of specific provision and support for women candidates. UNOGBIS also facilitated training for the media in preparation for the elections with a strong emphasis on the role of the media in promoting women's participation and ensuring the visibility of women's issues during the electoral campaign. One newspaper is regularly publishing articles about women in the electoral process, and several radio programmes are being prepared on the same theme.

X. Staff security

41. Despite the socio-economic problems faced by the population at large, the crime rate is relatively low, although incidents of petty crime continue. During the reporting period, one street theft and one home break-in attempt affecting United Nations staff members were reported. United Nations personnel can circulate freely in the country, in accordance with basic security rules.

XI. Observations and recommendations

42. I wish to commend the generous contributions made by the European Commission, ECOWAS, Angola, Brazil, Portugal, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Peacebuilding Fund and UNDP to the electoral basket fund to finance the legislative elections scheduled for 16 November 2008. While the electoral funding gap has narrowed considerably, the closing of the gap is critical for the successful conduct of the elections. I therefore appeal to other partners to contribute generously to help close the gap in a timely manner. I am encouraged that preparations for the elections are on track, and in that connection I commend the Government and the people of Guinea-Bissau for the recent successful voter registration exercise, which recorded 94.6 per cent participation. That exercise was a demonstration of civic maturity and broad commitment to democracy.

43. I remain concerned, however, about the volatile security and political situation in Guinea-Bissau, especially at a time when the country is preparing for crucial elections. I again call on all national stakeholders to work cooperatively and peacefully together in the national interest and with respect for the rule of law in order to ensure that the legislative elections take place in a stable and peaceful atmosphere. That would contribute to the steady consolidation of peace, which in turn would help create conditions for vital economic reforms and development.

44. As the media have an important role to play, not only during elections but in the consolidation of peace and the promotion of democratic governance overall, I call on them to afford equal coverage to all parties and strive constantly to preserve professional ethics, professionalism and credibility.

45. Concern that drug trafficking and organized crime are spreading to Guinea-Bissau casts an increasingly dark shadow over the country and threatens not only to erase the important progress in the area of governance, but also to undermine ongoing efforts for longer-term peacebuilding. Affecting peace and security, health, the economy and the rule of law, the increase in drug trafficking could wreak havoc throughout the country and along its borders, as evidence is mounting that criminal gangs are increasingly operating in concert across porous West African borders. Although gathering data is difficult, recent events and even the statements of the country's leaders have shown that the volume of drug trafficking through Guinea-Bissau is much greater than previously thought. I am especially concerned about reports that Guinea-Bissau is no longer merely a transit hub, but appears to be fast becoming a major market place in the drug trade. I am encouraged that the authorities have informed my Representative that they would be prepared to support robust, concrete action to target alleged participants at home, as well as their foreign collaborators. In this connection, I reiterate my call to the Security Council to take strong action and to that end to consider establishing a

panel of experts to investigate the identity and activities of those involved in drug trafficking and organized crime in Guinea-Bissau, with the possibility of taking measures, including punitive, targeted sanctions that would help reverse the current disturbing growth in the drug trafficking crisis in the country.

46. Recent reports of a coup plot by elements within the military highlight the fragile situation of the State and constitute a setback to the progress made since 2005 to promote a culture of democratic, civilian-military relations, in which the military is subordinate and accountable to civilian authorities. It is disappointing that some actors still believe that coups, not dialogue, are the solution to whatever grievances they may have or that they represent the best means of attaining power. I call on all political actors not to use the military to advance their individual political agendas. I also call on the military to continue to honour its professional and republican tradition to protect and defend the State. On a positive note, I acknowledge that considerable efforts have been made by the defence and security sectors, working with civilian authorities and the international community, in promoting security sector reform. I encourage them to continue to consolidate their efforts towards implementing the Government's plans to restructure and modernize the armed forces.

47. I welcome the progress that continues to be made in the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with Guinea-Bissau. I am particularly pleased to note that the implementation of the four quick-impact projects under the short-term engagement of the Peacebuilding Fund is actively under way, and I urge United Nations agencies and their national partners to continue to cooperate closely to ensure the timely completion of the projects and thus help lay a strong foundation for the Peacebuilding Commission to continue to engage Guinea-Bissau over the longer term. The United Nations system will remain active and supportive in that vital process, and I call on the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to continue, through the National Steering Committee, to play their partnership role fully.

48. In conclusion, I would like, once again, to commend the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my Representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as the personnel of the entire United Nations country team, for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau, often under challenging circumstances.